

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 242284 TOSEC 280051

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S E C R E T STATE 242284 TOSEC 280051

EXDIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT DAMASCUS 6570 ACTION SECSTATE, INFO AMMAN, BEIRUT,
CAIRO, TEL AVIV, BAGHDAD DTD 29 SEP 76.

QTE:S E C R E T DAMASCUS 6570

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: FPOR, SY, LE, PLO

SUBJECT: KHADDAM COMMENTS ON LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS

REF: DAMASCUS 6551

1. SUMMARY:

KHADDAM SAYS SYRIA IS CLEANING PALESTINIAN LEFTIST
FORCES OUT OF METN AREA HAVING DECIDED BOTH THAT POLITICAL
NEGOTIATIONS ARE UNPROMISING AND AS A NECESSARY REACTION TO
ATTACK ON SEMIRAMIS HOTEL IN DAMASCUS. CAMPAIGN PROCEEDING
SATISFACTORILY. SARKIS APPARENTLY NOT INFORMED OF SYRIAN
INTENTIONS BUT KHADDAM CLAIMS SYRIAN MILITARY ACTIONS WILL
HELP SARKIS BUT KEEPING HIM FROM WASTING HIS PRESTIGE IN
EXTENDED NEGOTIATIONS.

END SUMMARY.

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PAGE 02 STATE 242284 TOSEC 280051

2. IN MEETING AFTERNOON SPET 29, I ASKED FONMIN KHADDAM IF OPENING MILITARY CAMPAIGN IN LEBANON YESTERDAY SIGNIFIED A COLLAPSE OF POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS. KHADDAM REPLIED DAMASCUS HAD COME TO REALIZE THERE WAS "NO SERIOUSNESS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS. ALSO IT WAS INEVITABLE AFTER THE ATTACK ON THE SEMIRAMIS HOTEL THAT WE WOULD HAVE TO TAKE A FORCEFUL STEP."

3. ASKED HOW LONG THE FIGHTING WOULD CONTINUE, HE REPLIED, "EVERY DAY HAS ITS PROGRAM AND, TODAY'S WILL FINISH THIS EVENING. THE POSITIONS AGAINST WHICH WE ARE ADVANCING IN CLEANING UP THE METN ARE IMPORTANT MILITARILY AND POLITICALLY. THE CAMPAIGN IS PROCEEDING SATISFACTORILY." ASSERTED THAT AS OF EARLY AFTERNOON SYRIANS HAVE NOW TAKEN OVER AYNTOURA, TARSHISH, QARNAYYIL, AND ALL BUT A FEW HOUSES IN HAMMANA. ASKED IF THERE WERE ANY MILITARY INITIATIVES IN THE DIRECTION OF SIDON OR BEIRUT, KHADDAM SAID NO, ADDING SLYLY THAT IN THIS SITUATION A STEP-BY-STEP POLICY IS USEFUL.

4. ASKED IF HE THOUGHT PRESENT CAMPAIGN WOULD AFFECT SARKIS' ABILITY TO PURSUE POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS, KHADDAM REPLIED, "IF SARKIS CONTINUES TO NEGOTIATE FOR FOUR MONTHS, HE WILL LOSE ALL HIS PRESTIGE. WE MUST HELP HIM."

5. ASKED SPECIFICALLY IF SARKIS HAD BEEN INFORMED ABOUT YESTERDAY'S BATTLE BEFORE IT STARTED, KHADDAM REPLIED THAT DAMASCUS HAS A REGULAR EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION WITH SARKIS BUT "DID NOT WISH TO EMBARRASS THE LEBANESE PRESIDENT." KHADDAM NOTED THAT THE FACT SARKIS TOOK HIS OATH OF OFFICE IN CHTAURA WHERE THE SYRIANS MAINTAIN SECURITY WAS POLITICALLY SIGNIFICANT FOR TWO REASONS: FIRST, IT RECOGNIZED THAT SECURITY EXISTS IN THAT AREA THANKS TO SYRIA AND, SECOND, THAT THE SYRIAN PRESENCE IS LEGITIMATE IN LEBANON.

6. COMMENT:

THIS WAS ONE OF THE FRANKEST STATEMENTS KHADDAM HAS
SECRET

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PAGE 03 STATE 242284 TOSEC 280051

YET MADE TO ME ABOUT SYRIAN ACTIONS IN LEBANON. JUDGING BY HIS STATEMENTS, SEPT 28 CAMPAIGN WAS NEITHER AT SARKIS' REQUEST AND NOR APPARENTLY EVEN WITH HIS PRIOR KNOWLEDGE. WE UNDERSTAND CHAMOUN HAS DESCRIBED CAMPAIGN AS PURELY SYRIAN INITIATIVE. WOULD APPEAR THAT SYRIA INTENDS TO PURSUE METN CLEARANCE OPERATION TO ITS CONCLUSION AND WILL NOT WORRY MUCH ABOUT CRITICISM OF ITS ROLE BY OUTSIDE PARTIES, IT WILL, HOWEVER, PROBABLY CONTINUE TO PORTRAY ITSELF PUBLICLY

AS PLAYING MINOR ROLE IN SUPPORT OF LEBANESE ARAB ARMY
VANGUARD AND "GOOD PALESTINIANS", I.E., SAIQA.

7. AM FORCED TO RETRACT MY EARLIER ASSESSMENT THAT SEMIRAMIS
ATTACK HAD NO DIRECT BEARING ON YESTERDAY'S
CAMPAIGN (PARA 6, DAMASCUS 6551). KHADDAM'S LINKING
SEMIRAMIS WITH THE METN ATTACK CONFIRMS OTHER REPORTS
WE HAVE RECEIVED THAT DAMASCUS HOLDS FATAH IN GENERAL
AND PERHAPS ARAFAT PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR SUNDAY'S
HOTEL INCIDENT. IT CLEARLY UNWILLING TO EXCUSE ATTACK
AS HAVING BEEN ONE SOLE INITIATIVE OF ABU NIDAL IN BAGHDAD.
MURPHY UNQTE: ROBINSON

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